



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Office of Campaign & Political Finance

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Roger Tougas, Chairman
House Committee on Ethics
State House
Room 163
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Tougas:

This is in response to your recent request for an advisory opinion as to whether M.G.L. c. 55, the campaign finance law, would prohibit a legislator from bringing into his state house office a computer purchased with funds of the political committee organized on his behalf.

You have stated that the proposed use of the computer system would be for the sole purpose of the legislator keeping an accurate record of his constituency calls, service and results of constituency inquiries. This opinion is based on this representation, as well as on the presumption that the primary purpose of maintaining this information is so that it can be used for political campaign purposes at a later date.

M.G.L. c. 55, section 6, states in relevant part, that "A political committee, duly organized, may receive, pay and expend money for the enhancement of the political future of the candidate...for which the committee was organized so long as such expenditure is not primarily for the candidate's or other person's personal use." The use of the computer system as described by you is consistent with the requirement that expenditures enhance the political future of the candidate. However, because a political committee is expending funds to acquire the use of the computer, its use must be restricted to political purposes.

The campaign finance law clearly regulates the use of public facilities, and public employees, for campaign finance purposes. In Anderson v. City of Boston, Mass. Adv. Sh. 2297 (1978), the Supreme Judicial Court stated that the provisions of M.G.L. c. 55 "demonstrates a general legislative intent to keep political fundraising out of the hands of non-elective public employees and city and town halls." While this case dealt specifically with a municipality it is clear that this description of legislative intent applies to state and county buildings as well as state and county employees. Section 13 of Chapter 55 provides that

"No person employed for compensation, other than an elected officer, by the commonwealth or any county, city or town shall directly or indirectly solicit or receive any gift, payment, contribution, assessment, subscription or promise of money or other thing of value for the political campaign purposes of any candidate for public office or of any political committee, or for any political purpose whatever..."

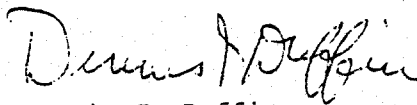
Section 14 states that "No persons shall in any building or part thereof occupied for state, county or municipal purposes demand, solicit or receive any payment or gift of money or other thing of value for the purposes set forth in section thirteen..."

In my opinion, the campaign finance law would not prohibit a computer used solely for maintaining a record of constituency calls, services and results of constituency inquiries from being brought into the legislator's office. This assumes that it is understood that a computer may only have been purchased with political committee funds if the purpose of maintaining the records described above is for their subsequent use in one's political campaign. At such time that this computer is to be used for any fundraising purpose, it must be removed from any public building, including the State House. Furthermore, no public employee, other than an elected official, may operate the computer for any fundraising purposes in any location.

Any item or any other thing of value which is acquired with funds of a political committee remain the property of that committee. Any such property may in no way be used "primarily for the candidates' or any other persons' personal use," as stated in Section 6. Furthermore, at such time that the committee is dissolved, this item must be disposed of in accordance with the provisions for dissolution contained in G.L. c. 55.

This opinion has been rendered solely on the basis of representations made by you, and no independent investigation of any activities contained herein has been made. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Very truly yours,



Dennis J. Duffin
Director

DJD/rep